



Theatres Trust
Conference 17:

Theatres & Placemaking

17 October | Lyric Hammersmith

Conference Report





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Introduction & Overview

The Theatres Trust Conference 17 took place on 17 October. Over 250 theatre artists and managers, architects, consultants, community organisations, developers, and local authority planning and culture officers, and elected members came together at the Lyric Hammersmith to discuss theatres and placemaking.

The theme goes to the heart of the Theatres Trust's mission to ensure that communities across the UK can enjoy live performance in their local theatre wherever they live. We do this through our advice, campaigning and funding work with theatres, local authorities and communities, promoting and protecting well designed and vibrant theatres at the heart of communities.

The day kicked off with an inspiring welcome address from Councillor Steve Cowan, Leader of Hammersmith and Fulham Council. He spoke about his vision of promoting social democracy and how the council has continued to invest in culture, including the redevelopment of our host venue, the Lyric, in spite of significant budget cuts, because the arts are central to a good society.

There followed five packed sessions where we heard from a wide range of theatre operators and artists, planners, local authorities, architects and developers talking with passion about the work they are doing to create great places where people want to live, work and play, by placing theatres and cultural infrastructure at the heart of their plans.

What emerged from the day was a clear sense and some very tangible case studies demonstrating how theatres are central to regeneration and placemaking. They often form, as in the case of the New Diorama, Sunderland MACQ, the Taunton Brewhouse and the Lyric Hammersmith, the 'anchor' to a wider development, and several speakers argued the importance of thinking about our theatres as part of wider placemaking and, crucially, to ensure this is reflected in Local Plans.

Communities formed the backbone of deliberations throughout the day, starting with Cara Courage's argument for the community to be at the centre of placemaking. A theatre is always in dialogue with the community it serves and many of the case studies emphasised the importance of in-depth community engagement to ensure that plans respect the community meaning, value and aspirations of place and to ensure a sense of ownership. As projects such

as York Theatre Royal and Tara Arts demonstrate, that dialogue never ends and theatres must respond to changing community needs, constantly evolving their artistic direction and the architecture which facilitates their work.

It was also striking how many presentations spoke about the placemaking function of theatres beyond their bricks and mortar. Theatres are about storytelling and meaning-making and through engagement with communities they can unlock civic engagement and help communities to connect with wider issues of place. As such it is important for theatres to think about working outside their four walls and across different sectors to embed their placemaking value.

There was much discussion about the relative merits of local authority, developer and community-led cultural placemaking. We heard about some excellent developer-led theatre projects at Regent's Place and King's Cross, inspiring community-led projects in Edinburgh and Swindon and some bold local authority-led projects in Chester and Taunton. A sort of 'north-south divide' emerged with developers often leading on projects in the south east, but a greater emphasis on communities and local authorities playing a strong role elsewhere in the country. However what was most inspiring was that all these stakeholders saw clear benefits from investing in theatres and broader cultural infrastructure, even if their motivations diverged.

Theatres should be comfortable with a multiplicity of approaches depending on their particular context, but whoever the stakeholders are, fundamental to successful cultural placemaking is investment in dialogue and relationship building.

The current economic and political context continues to be challenging but, as Councillor Cowan and Paul Callaghan argued, culture is even more important to our wellbeing as individuals and as a society. It is critical that as communities, developers and local authorities, we continue to invest in our theatres, not only for their contribution to regeneration and the local economy, but also for the stories they tell, helping us to understand ourselves, our community and our world. In the words of poet Dean Atta writing for the reopening Gala of the redeveloped Lyric, theatres are our 'moral masonry', they create meaning and identity and they make places worth living in.

Bricks and Mortar

By Dean Atta, award winning performance poet and Lyric Young Company alumnus.

When even these bricks can be re-laid, rearranged or extended, the possibilities remain endless

for human life and imagination. For all stories and conversation we build upon a foundation of

understanding and truth. Even fantasy works only in relation to reality. Society needs stories

from which to build its morality. Basically, call it moral masonry. And when we meet someone

new we are prone to a vanity, telling complimentary tales of our own mortality... Life or its

best parts are the moments we can turn into stories and art. Paint a picture, set the scene

or settle the score. These bricks built this present, now inherited by those meeting a fresh mortar.

But when they are laid here, they will both stand out and fit in, just as we do all over Britain. Our bricks

may be made from clay, concrete, line-and-stone or may have come from another home. There are gaps

that need filling; there are stories that need telling. The world is falling apart and all we can do is make

something beautiful out of all these pieces. Perhaps if enough broken bricks come together, we can make ourselves feel whole?

Lyric Theatre
Credit: Jim Stephenson

Placemaking in Context

Chair:

Jon Morgan

Speakers:

Dr Cara Courage

Independent Researcher & Strategist, Futurecity

Paul Callaghan CBE

Chair, Sunderland Music, Arts & Culture Trust

Anna Devlet

Head of Community, British Land

David Byrne

Artistic & Executive Director, New Diorama Theatre

Cara Courage

Futurecity

Cara explained that placemaking is not just about iconic buildings, street furniture or public art. It's not even just about physical space – it's also about the cultural, economic social and environmental connections between communities.

She argued that true placemaking puts the community front and centre of determining what their place looks like and how it functions. In this sense it's about culture and traditions, how a community decides to celebrate itself and how it defines itself.

Introducing the concept of 'creative placemaking', Cara explained that good placemaking must understand people as well as place:

“Places are made by and with the community, not to the community or indeed in spite of the community.”

She argued that the arts are a fantastic tool for facilitating this kind of placemaking, for both understanding people and place, and for engaging communities in the wider issues of place, such as housing, education, transit, safety. Drawing on various project examples across the UK and US she outlined a three stage process whereby engagement in arts and culture can:



What is placemaking and how do theatres and wider cultural infrastructure contribute?

1. Get people civically minded and active
2. Create a critical mass to activate place revitalisation
3. Join this dynamic to the more formal systems of place e.g. housing, education etc.

Addressing the specific role of theatres, Cara argued that although theatres have an obvious role in regeneration and identity through their physical presence and connection architecturally, socially and culturally, their *function* is as important as their *form*.

“The heart of placemaking is storytelling. What else is the arts more broadly and theatre specifically than storytelling?”

She identified the changing dynamics within planning and placemaking with the increasing leadership role of developers. Whilst she identified this as an opportunity, she also warned that theatres need to be clear about where and how they might want to work with developers.

She encouraged theatres to consider working more outside their own walls to engage communities in placemaking and to consider the potential to play a brokering role within creative placemaking for their town or city by working across sectors.

“Theatres need to be part of the placemaking conversation and theatre practitioners can bring in the tools to make that conversation happen.”

Paul Callaghan

Sunderland Music Arts & Culture Trust

Paul spoke about the exciting work he is leading at the Sunderland Music Arts and Culture Trust, with a major regeneration project with cultural infrastructure at its heart.

He explained the significant social and economic challenges facing Sunderland. Arguing the critical need to address this inequality, he outlined the three pillars to build a great city:

1. A strong economy
2. Excellent education for all
3. A vibrant cultural system

Echoing the sentiments of Councillor Cowan's welcome address, he challenged the idea that culture should be seen merely as 'the icing on the cake' when

communities and local authorities are facing more pressing social and economic needs:

“In my city, culture is one of the key ingredients.”

He talked about the context in many northern towns and cities, in contrast to the south where philanthropy and private investment play a major role, the local authority, and often the local university, continues to be vitally important to regeneration.

Even in the face of 70-80% cuts he persuaded the local authority, alongside the university, to work with the Trust to create a cultural strategy. A key part of this strategy was about investing in skills development of local people with cultural skills training and cultural events in schools and communities. These people will be as much part of making the difference as the local authority or the university.

He explained how the strategy divided the city into five cultural and heritage areas with each partner taking a lead responsibility, one of which is the Music, Arts and Culture Quarter (MACQ) which will include space for performing arts groups and a new 800-seat theatre.

Paul emphasised the need to think holistically, both in terms of a good overall offer to audiences and communities, and creating a viable economic model – the adjoining bar development profits will underwrite the theatre for the next 10 years and will allow the theatre to peg tickets prices from £9-£20 to ensure the work is fully accessible to all communities.

He concluded that the project will succeed because arts and culture can change society, the economy, people’s identity and the way they see themselves and their place.

Anna Devlet & David Byrne

New Diorama Theatre

Anna and David talked about their long term partnership building and running the New Diorama Theatre as a central hub within British Land’s overall development at Regents Place.

British Land purchased the site over 30 years ago with an ambition to transform the area which was mostly office blocks adjacent to the Regent’s Park Estate, one of the largest inner London housing estates. They came together with various residential and faith groups, business organisations, Camden Council planning department and local arts organisation, Diorama Arts, to work out how they could jointly make the area a better place to visit, live or work in. The final proposal included commercial and residential development, lots of public realm improvements and a theatre. The theatre opened in 2010 and the main focus was on finding a purpose and identity which responded to the expectation and ambition from the

local community for a space that felt like it belonged to them and which had a distinctive offer with the West End only one mile away. The programme combines lots of community engagement projects, free use for anyone in West Euston for performance or creative projects, and a focus on offering a venue for theatre companies, particularly from outside London, who need somewhere affordable to stage their work in the capital.

Anna acknowledged that without the theatre they would not have been able to attract such a wide range of visitors and local people across the economic spectrum to the area and it has helped British Land to be connected locally to various groups and organisations in a far deeper way. Placing the theatre at the centre of the development has ensured it remains lively outside office hours and attracts people to walk across the development and feel like it belongs to them.

For British Land there have been significant commercial and social impacts. The area is in the top 1% of all London for reductions in deprivation, they have enjoyed 100% occupancy for their commercial spaces and property values have grown at twice the rate of equivalent spaces in the West End of London.

The key success factor for both the theatre and British Land has been lots of early dialogue and engagement with each other, the community and other stakeholders to ensure there is benefit for all parties around a shared goal.

Key Themes

- Theatres are central to regeneration and placemaking, often as an ‘anchor’ within a wider development and we need to argue this case confidently with funders and other stakeholders.
- Placemaking is about a community’s culture and traditions and consulting with and investing in communities must be at the heart of placemaking.
- Theatre has a powerful role to play in placemaking by engaging communities and acting as a bridge between communities, local authorities, developers and other stakeholders.
- Theatres need to work more outside their four walls both with communities and working across disciplines with other stakeholders.
- While it is important for theatres to be clear how and why they might work with a developer, investment in early dialogue to reach a shared goal will reap rewards for both parties.
- While the role of the developer in culture and placemaking is increasingly prominent in the south east, in the north local authorities continue to play a critical role.

Civic Pride: Local Authorities & Cultural Placemaking

Chair:

Ruth Eastwood

Speakers:

Ed Bayes

Policy Officer, Culture at Risk, Greater London Authority

Graham Lister

Project Director, Storyhouse Chester

Councillor Louise Gittins

Deputy Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council

Ian Timms

Assistant Director for Business Development, Taunton Dean and West Somerset Council

Vanessa Lefrancois

Chief Executive, Brewhouse Theatre & Arts Centre

Tim Foster

Partner, Foster Wilson Architects

Ed Bayes

Greater London Authority

Ed spoke about how the Greater London Authority (GLA) are protecting and promoting cultural buildings across London by embedding culture in placemaking and planning policy.

Supporting the arts and creativity is seen as a core priority of Sadiq Khan's administration as Mayor of London and the culture team within the GLA has grown as a result. Ed highlighted some of the key areas in which they were supporting the arts and arts organisations.

Work has begun on creating the first Cultural Planning Framework. This new guidance will introduce the Agent of Change principle requiring developers to manage the impacts of the change. Notably this would require developers to soundproof new buildings near existing live venues. Venues with amplified sound and music, including theatres and music venues, can be put at risk if new residents complain about noise from the venue so this should act to protect theatres and music venues.

The GLA is introducing Creative Enterprise Zones to encourage small creative businesses through affordable workspaces and business advice in specific areas of London. Cultural use of spaces awaiting redevelopment has animated many parts of London,

What are the benefits of investing in theatres and wider cultural infrastructure? What are the challenges for local authorities in protecting, adapting and building cultural buildings and how can they overcome them?

and the framework will encourage these 'meanwhile uses'. The new framework should also encourage good growth by design involving architects and planners and will set ambitious design standards.

Funding is being made available through the Good Growth Fund encouraging local authorities to present bids in collaboration with their local communities for culture driven growth. The Mayor has recently named Waltham Forest and Brent council as London Borough of Culture 2019 and 2020. The Mayor also supports community projects with contributions of up to £50,000 through Crowdfund London.

Graham Lister & Louise Gittins

Storyhouse Chester

Graham and Louise explained why and how they went about building support for and investment in the recently opened Storyhouse in Chester following the closure of the Gateway Theatre in 2007.

The first scheme for the building was much larger at £43m and when it became clear that the Arts Council were not going to contribute funding towards this, the scheme was rethought. The brief was for a high quality building that was affordable and deliverable, a culture centre. The Storyhouse project which emerged was funded predominantly by the council, £32m of the total £37m cost. A project of this scale needed to achieve cross party consensus and collaboration and from the outset a partnership board was formed with representatives from the main parties and other stakeholders including, the architects, contractors, funders and sponsors.

The Storyhouse combines an adaptable theatre space with a cinema and a major public library. It is based around an art deco Odeon which the council had acquired and includes a new build extension to the existing building which houses the theatre.



The Odeon was seen as a focal point of many older residents' cultural experiences but the large capacity made it unsuitable for modern cinema use so it seemed appropriate to reimagine the building in this way. The sentimental attachment that residents have towards a building should not be underestimated, and work done to these buildings must be carried out sensitively and in cooperation with them.

Involvement of the community throughout the project made sure they felt a real ownership of the new identity for the building. This included engaging with communities, not just in the City but throughout the borough including local groups, children and the artistic community. Louise Gittins recalled the books being moved from the old library to this new space by way of a snaking line of children passing them, one by one.

The key step in creating the designs for the theatre was the identification of an operator. Chester Performs were already operating in the city and produced outdoor theatre in the park. They were appointed and given support to build the capacity needed to run a venue. The theatre space is specially adapted to convert between a 500-seat thrust stage for the season of produced work and an 800-seat proscenium stage for receiving touring shows. This allows Chester Performs to transfer work between the Grosvenor Park and the Storyhouse. The concept for the management of the building is that it should feel like one organisation runs the whole building and while the Library Service remains under the remit of the local authority there are no delineated spaces within the building.

A project on this scale has ignited the imaginations of the residents with a surge in library memberships and the council being asked "what's next?" for the city.

Ian Timms, Vanessa Lefrancois & Tim Foster
Brewhouse Theatre & Arts Centre, Taunton Ian,

Vanessa and Tim discussed their plans for a new cultural quarter based around the redevelopment of the Brewhouse.

Taunton is the South West's Garden Town and as part of the drive to create new homes, a Town Plan has been developed. The town centre redevelopment area is called the Coal Orchard, and the Brewhouse Theatre is at the heart of this. Leisure arts and culture is threaded throughout the plan and it will involve the renovation of the Brewhouse building. It is hoped that the presence of the theatre will draw people into the town centre increasing the footfall for the new businesses and animating the space for new residents.

Following the removal of subsidy the theatre closed in 2013 and was reopened with a volunteer workforce. From there it has grown and now employs a small staff. Vanessa Lefrancois credits the decline of the venue to its failure to evolve and has consulted with the local community about what they wanted the theatre to be. While many residents expressed a fondness for the theatre she was shocked to hear how long it had been since some of them had attended. Since reopening they have built up to a £1m turnover and this redevelopment will allow them to continue to grow.

The works to the theatre will include a new flytower and increased capacity, in order to be more attractive to visiting companies. Reorienting the building will create a more animated and welcoming entrance and a riverfront foyer. The theatre building will include two floors of residential accommodation which may be used as a cross subsidy for the building or for visiting companies.

Key Themes

- Even in times of austerity councils recognise culture's value and make it a central tenet of regeneration, often as 'anchor tenants' of a new development.
- Planning policies can protect and enable culture through enacting agent of change principles and identifying creative and cultural enterprise zones.
- Do not underestimate the power of people's nostalgic connection to cultural buildings. They are the centre of communities and experiences and people are protective of them, so meaningful community engagement is critical.
- Opportunities for major arts capital projects do not happen regularly and so when they do it is vital that the proposal is accepted by the community and properly scoped to provide the best possible facility.
- A successful theatre regeneration project can increase community engagement and aspirations.
- Theatres need to continually evolve in response to changing community needs.

Cultural Citizens: Communities Putting Culture on the Map

Chair:

Ann Skippers

Speakers:

Brian Whiteley

Planning Advisor, Planning Aid England

Daniel Rose

Executive Director, Mechanics' Institution Trust

Hannah Garrow

Fundraising and Community Engagement Director,
Leith Theatre Trust

Brian Whiteley

Planning Aid England

Brian began by giving an overview of the English planning system, noting the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish systems are similar in the way they operate. He explained it is a plan-led system whereby the vision and policies for an area are set out in a plan, and all planning applications are then assessed against the desired outcomes of that plan.

There are the three tiers of these plans, being spatial plans prepared for a region such as the Greater Manchester Spatial Plan or the London Plan, local plans prepared for a district or borough, and neighbourhood plans prepared for a specific local area. While everyone has the ability to comment on the preparation of a local or regional plan, Brian noted the general lack of theatre policies in these plans and highlighted the role of the neighbourhood plan as the best way for communities to promote the arts sector and cultural planning and placemaking.

Neighbourhood Plans and neighbourhood development orders were introduced in England in 2012, but unlike the other tiers of plans, they can be prepared directly by the local community themselves. While they cannot be contrary to a higher tier plan, neighbourhood plans lets the community decide the type of development that they want, identify cultural assets to safeguard, and even how to spend money on local projects collected through the community infrastructure levy. Brian concluded by stating that communities can lead cultural placemaking, they just need to use the planning tools available, and organisations such as Locality who are there to help.

How are local communities engaging in cultural placemaking through campaigning to protect theatres? What are the challenges they face and how can they overcome them? How can we encourage greater community involvement in cultural planning and placemaking?

His key message to theatres was to develop your relationship with the local authority or any community forum in your area to make sure your voice is heard when promoting theatres and culture through the planning system.

Daniel Rose

Swindon Mechanics' Institution

Daniel introduced the work of the Mechanics' Institution Trust, a social enterprise, building preservation and development trust, and their ambition to bring the Grade II* listed Swindon Mechanics' Institute back to life as a community-run theatre. Daniel began with a brief history of Swindon, noting that while the Great Western Railway put the town on the map, there were no benefactors to provide theatres or museums like many other towns, nor did it have a university or cathedral to give it an identity. So it was the community who had to come together to pay for and develop the community and cultural facilities needed to support the rapidly expanding town and the Mechanics' Institute became that cultural focus point.

The Mechanics' Institution Trust was initially established to save the Mechanics Institute, but a number of former public buildings in the railway village area are now vacant and in a poor state, and it very quickly developed a broader mission to undertake placemaking for the wider area after realising the opportunity to regenerate the community, not just a building. The organisation has worked hard to involve the community and run events and local programmes to keep them engaged and to establish what facilities and venues the community need and want to revitalise the wider area.

Central to this has been ensuring the Trust had a clear collective vision, and the skills and ability to move from a campaigning organisation to an organisation that can deliver and can successfully take back control of local assets so that they can be run to benefit the local community. So far they have managed to refurbish and reopen a number of buildings, and continue their negotiations with the local council to be able to finally rejuvenate the Institute itself. The asset transfer process is the biggest hindrance to the process.



Hannah Garrow
Leith Theatre

Hannah talked about their success in the partial re-opening and animating of Leith Theatre in Edinburgh, and the inclusive role it is playing in providing a versatile space to encourage a vibrant creative hub as part of the regeneration of the Leith area and the community it serves. Leith suffered economically and socially in the 1970s and 80s and the closure of a number of community and cultural venues, including Leith Theatre, led to a sharp decline. Fortunately this is now reversing, initially through government investment, particularly the relocation of the government offices to the former dock area, and now followed by private investment, and the rejuvenation of the Leith Theatre is the next stage of that wider regeneration and placemaking.

One of the biggest issues the Trust has faced is the lack of awareness of the theatre. It does not have direct street frontage and has been closed for so long that the local community had forgotten it exists. It has therefore worked hard to get the community to value the theatre as a potential cultural venue and has done this by hosting one off festivals and events to try and bring the building back to life. This in turn should generate income to allow wider restoration of the building and its permanent reopening.

As with Swindon, negotiating the lease and restoration liabilities with the local authority has been a difficult process, and the lease needs to be for a sufficient length of time to fundraise and unlock grants to help fund the work. Like Daniel, Hannah emphasised the need for the Trust to have a collective vision and the right skills to manage and operate a listed and significant cultural building.

Key Themes

- Communities can lead on cultural placemaking by engaging with planning through neighbourhood and local plans.
- Theatres can capitalise on this by engaging with local community forums as well as the local authority when developing their plans.
- It is important that the value of theatres is reflected more in national planning policy.
- Community engagement with lots of events and programmes will raise profile and help to mobilise support and input into a theatre's plans.
- It is important to ensure all stakeholders have a shared vision and that the community group has the right skills to shift from campaigning to delivery.
- Community asset transfer can be challenging and it is important that local authorities offer leases which are long enough to unlock capital funding and offer a fair deal in terms of restoration and repair liabilities.

People, Places & Spaces: Designing Democratic Theatres

Chair:

Paddy Dillon

Speakers:

Damian Cruden

Artistic Director, York Theatre Royal

Angus Morrogh-Ryan

Director, De Matos Ryan Architects

David Watson

Associate Director, Rick Mather Architects

Sian Alexander

Executive Director, Lyric Hammersmith

Jatinder Verma MBE

Artistic Director, Tara Arts

Julian Middleton

Executive Director, Aedas Arts Team

Damian Cruden & Angus Morrogh-Ryan

York Theatre Royal

Damian and Angus discussed their recent award-winning transformation of the Theatre Royal, York. When Damian arrived at the theatre, it had a loyal following but was failing to reach the wider community and younger audiences. The transformation project was aimed at changing the physical dynamic of the theatre to extend to a new audience.

It is the oldest theatre on a single site outside of London, built in 1744 over the ruins of St Leonard's Hospital. It is a theatre with a history of change, with building works every 50 to 70 years, and a complex layering of history – a building that sits on medieval foundations, has a Georgian core, a Victorian shell, alterations from the Edwardian period and an elegant glass walled 60s extension by Patrick Gwynne.

However, the theatre found itself locked in by its history and architecture and unable to react to the desired change in artistic direction. The traditional style auditorium (a major rebuild by Frank Tugwell in 1902) whilst successful for the more traditional shows and pantomimes, struggled for comedy and children's performances. The exterior of the building was opaque and uninviting and there was a real need to improve the connection and flow through the theatre.

The transformation project released unused space to improve flow and circulation and sympathetically

How does a theatre building relate to its local community? How do the architecture and ethos of a theatre shape one another and how do they combine to create a sense of community ownership, belonging and identity?

re-planned the auditorium, re-tiering the stalls to rake them up to the circle balcony front thereby resolving the problems with audience connectivity. The found space beneath the re-tiered stalls has been utilised as a new bar, greatly increasing the front of house space. The colonnade has been glazed-in and now provides an active, transparent frontage to engage with the city.

A theatre is about democratising art – the comparison was given to owning a book when you read it, rather than when you buy it. The project has been about engagement and about providing a space and a means for a community to participate in theatre. What has also become apparent throughout the project is that community needs are not static – there is a continual shifting of dynamic between theatre and its place and that both artistic direction and architecture need to be able to respond.

David Watson & Sian Alexander

Lyric Hammersmith

The Lyric is another project steeped in history and with a deep connection to its community, being a much loved part of Hammersmith since Frank Matcham's original building graced the site in 1895. When plans to demolish the theatre and replace it with a shopping centre were approved, public outcry was so great that the council insisted the new development include the theatre. The theatre is now an architectural surprise – a late Victorian Rococo theatre embedded within a 70s concrete block.

Because of the theatre's history, the Lyric has a deep sense of responsibility towards its local community. Consultation and dialogue with the local community were therefore central to the 2012 redevelopment brief. From this emerged a project with a desire to provide greater access and a wider

community reach by breaking down both physical and metaphorical barriers and increasing the theatre's presence and visibility.

The redevelopment project has greatly increased the building's visibility through the creation of an entrance on the Lyric Square which includes an outdoor performance space. A new exterior allows glimpses both into and out of the building from ground level up, thereby ensuring a continual connectivity with place. The works have also provided a large double height foyer containing a restaurant / bar – the heart of the new project from which all other facilities spiral - additional office space, rehearsal rooms, recording studios and dance studios.

The building is the second largest co-producing theatre after the National Theatre. It is also now a theatre with an extensive programme of events to engage young people and nurture young talent. The space created by the new building works has allowed the Lyric to expand across all areas of the arts and to become home to a partnership of leading arts organisations - from the local dance agency and world music company, through to a partnership with Cambridge University teaching coding and digital skills.

The programme also extends to working with marginalised or disadvantaged young people and working in partnership with local schools. It is a space that particularly resonates with young people. Last year there were 33,000 attendances at the Lyric's young people's programme – an increase of 25% from the first year.



Jatinder Verma & Julian Middleton
Tara Arts

Jatinder and Julian described how they collaborated on an award-winning refurbishment of the theatre, which reflects the needs and identity of their local community in Earlsfield, south west London.

Storytelling and dialogue has been the DNA of Tara since its founding. It is dialogue between east and west, between modernity and diversity, and a dialogue with the community. Storytelling has remained at the core of the refurbishment of the end of terrace Victorian building that has become the permanent

home for Tara. The new extension is reminiscent of the storytelling tree, growing out of the rammed earth floor of the auditorium and protecting those who tell the stories beneath the branch-like patterning on the façade of the new extension.

The building itself is only one room deep but the extension, which includes a new basement, has allowed new stage support space and public facilities. The auditorium is now a double height studio space with an earth floor. The refurbishment project also provides a rehearsal space – a critical new space to the theatre, which looks out onto the street but also into the auditorium.

The interior of the building is a fusion of East and West – front of house, historic doors and artefacts from India are overlaid on a modern building palette, whilst the auditorium uses reclaimed bricks from the original Mission Hall but again with hints of the east in the doors and joinery.

The resultant project is a layering of history, retaining the original building frontage and its connection with the street, but adding a new modern extension behind. The extension has helped raise the prominence of the building and, through a careful insertion of the new materials behind the historic, has provided a frontage that remembers the past but also looks to the future. The building is now bigger, more comfortable and more beautiful – 'beauty and environment is not just for us...it is a fundamentally democratising notion'. It also represents theatre's important role in placemaking - allowing creative dialogue to happen between the company, the work and the place it is set.

Key Themes

- Projects can have a slow gestation and should be allowed time to consider both artistic and community engagement and needs. This allows for organic placemaking, growth from bottom up.
- Placemaking has been formed through new partnerships, and finding different ways for community to engage in their buildings.
- It is important to breakdown the thresholds and attract a new audience that may not otherwise have come to a theatre.
- The layering of history, recognition of the past, and the meaning the community invests in the building has been critical to their successful evolution as buildings.
- Key to all was recognising the shifting relationship between the community and the theatre and understanding that this constant and changing dialogue requires continual evolution of both artistic direction and architecture.

Future Partnerships: Strengthening Theatres & Placemaking

Chair:

Tim Jones

Panel:

Deborah Aydon

Executive Director, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse

Ed Bayes

Policy Officer, Culture at Risk, Greater London Authority

Richard Blyth

Head of Policy, Royal Town Planning Institute

Tim Foster

Partner, Foster Wilson Architects

Daniel Rose

Executive Director, Mechanics' Institution Trust

Anna Strongman

Partner, Argent

The final plenary brought together a panel representing a wide range of stakeholders and perspectives. To kick off debate Anna Strongman and Deborah Aydon each offered a brief provocation.

Anna Strongman

Anna lamented that placemaking is an overused term in the building and development sector. She emphasised the importance of being clear what we mean by the term.

She stressed the limits on using planning gain such as Section 106 agreements as the demands on these are many and argued that if theatres really want to partner with developers they need to explore how the partnership can offer a commercial return for the developer.

She acknowledged that this is absolutely achievable. Argent are themselves building a 600-seat theatre at Kings Cross because it will add commercial value by attracting visitors and changing perceptions of the place. To undertake projects such as these Argent works with lots of partners who do not share their commercial drivers and this makes for sometimes challenging relationships around outcomes and content.

What would a future where theatres and cultural buildings are fully embedded in placemaking look like? How can existing policy support this and what changes in policy are needed? And how could stakeholders work across sectors to make this vision a reality?

Deborah Aydon

Deborah emphasised the importance of meaning. A physical space only becomes a 'place' when people define it as such because it means something to them. This means that anyone can make somewhere a place – e.g. skateboarders using an underpass. So the challenge for theatres and other partners interested in placemaking is how to balance bottom up and top down approaches, leading and responding, and how to respect the different meanings and associations communities may attach to a building or place.

For the redevelopment of the Everyman Theatre they talked to artists and communities with a deep emotional attachment to the theatre and then knocked it down and rebuilt it to 'release the essence of this very special place, to free it from an incarnation that was limiting what could happen there artistically and socially'.

All of this leads to the importance of involving people in how their places move forward, creating a social contract with the future. As Joan Littlewood said,

“Good theatre draws the energy out of the place where it is and gives it back as joie de vivre”.



Panel Discussion

Responding to questions from the floor, the panel explored the question of theatres and placemaking from a wide range of perspectives.

Top down / bottom up approaches and community engagement

A delegate asked the panel their view on balancing top down and bottom up approaches. For Anna Strongman community engagement and usage is the Holy Grail but as a developer it can be challenging to find ways to develop meaningful involvement with local community groups around programming.

Meanwhile space and working beyond our four walls

Another delegate commented on the long timescales for many developments and asked what the panel's views were on the use of 'meanwhile spaces'. Tim Jones said that at Futurecity engaging communities around temporary or meanwhile use was a really effective way of engaging them in longer term placemaking, and referring to the presentation by Damian Cruden he talked about the importance of theatres working beyond their four walls.

Deborah Aydon agreed and recalled that Cara Courage had talked about placemaking being what happens outside your building as well as what happens inside. At Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse they are experimenting with meanwhile use and outside spaces to invite the community to change how they think about theatre so as to inform future development plans for the theatre.

Function over form

Ed Bayes emphasised the importance of ensuring that buildings are seen as more than just bricks and mortar, and are fully utilised and recognised as incubators of talent.

Tim Foster agreed that the function and activities of a theatre are more important than their physical presence and their design. An architect can design a beautiful theatre but success depends on how that theatre is managed and curated.

The role of communities and local authorities

Daniel Rose argued that local authorities are not as connected to the community as they should be and have become 'over-professionalised'. He argued that there should be a stronger role for communities in placemaking and that through effective community organisations, they can respond and act more quickly than a local authority.

Richard Blyth contrasted this with examples heard earlier in the day of local authorities like Taunton and Chester who are being innovative and forward thinking. Local authorities need to take a holistic view of the strategy for a whole place; not separating out theatre or other different sectors but understanding and articulating through a core strategy how they are interconnected and all contribute to place. Local authorities also represent an important means of decentralising and localising decision making and spending and the introduction of devolution and local mayors is a great opportunity for culture and placemaking.

A delegate commented that it is important that local authorities include plans for culture in their Local Plan in line with NPPF guidance and Deborah Aydon commented on how the GLA is treating culture as an integral part of infrastructure alongside transport and housing.

Another delegate commented on the increasing privatisation of public spaces and the importance of local authorities working with developers around placemaking. Ed Bayes agreed that we need to be mindful of the longer term impact of assets being transferred from public into community or private ownership.

The role of developers

Tim Jones and Tim Foster both commented on the growing input from developers into cultural buildings. Tim Jones saw them as the new cultural patrons who have the capacity to be quicker and more flexible than local authorities.

Deborah Aydon agreed that private sector investment was welcome in the challenging public sector context. She warned that the diminishing funding available for theatre capital risks the deterioration of the theatre infrastructure which saw so much renewal in the 90s.

Tim Foster agreed that we should not be afraid of working with developers even though their motivations may be more commercially focused, but that the local authority continues to have an important role to play ensuring the developer provides the benefits and outcomes that make for good theatres and good placemaking.

Cross-sectoral working and plurality of approaches

Tim Jones argued that we need to be comfortable with a plurality of approaches from different stakeholders including local authorities, community groups and developers. Daniel Rose agreed that local authorities have an important role as enablers and facilitators of others, supporting community organisations or working collaboratively with developers.

Attendees

Dan Aldridge	Stage Electrics	Director
Sian Alexander	Lyric Hammersmith	Executive Director
Mark Anderson	GVA Acuity Ltd	Senior Project Manager
Ross Anthony	Theatres Trust	Planning Adviser
Claire Appleby	Theatres Trust	Architecture Adviser
Stephanie Applin	City, University of London	MA Culture, Policy & Management Student
James Atkinson	Alexandra Palace	Director of Fundraising
Deborah Aydon	Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse	Executive Director
Richard Baldwin	Theatres Trust Derwent London	Trustee Head of Development
Jason Barnes	Plann	Project Manager
Ed Bayes	Greater London Authority	Policy Officer, Culture at Risk, Culture and Creative Industries
Claire Beeson	LSi	Editor
David Beidas	New Stages Ltd	Director
Lesley Bell	Gallus Studio	Director
Philip Bernays	Newcastle Theatre Royal	Chief Executive
Chenine Bhatena	Greater London Authority	
Peter Bingham	Ashburton Arts	Director
Adam Blaxill	Stage Electrics	Director in Charge of Opus
Richard Blyth	Royal Town Planning Institute	Head of Policy
David Blyth	Theatres Trust Marina Theatre Lowestoft	Trustee Chair
Pam Bone	Theatres Trust Pam Bone Associates	Trustee
Faith Borerwe	Theatres Trust	Finance Officer
Sam Bowden	Chauvet Professional	European Product Manager
Paul Bowman	Bennetts Associates	Associate
Mark Bradbrook	M Bradbrook Electrical Services Limited	Director
Mike Bradford	Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre Trust	Director of Operations
Jeremy Bragg	Plann	Project Manager
Boyd Branch	University of Kent	Doctoral Student
Alex Brenner	Theatres Trust	Photographer
Cliff Broomfield	8build Ltd	Divisional Director
Phill Brown	UK Theatre	Head of Risk & Technical
Stephen Browning	Stephen Browning Associates	Director
David Brownlee	TRG Arts	Vice President for UK and Europe
Sandra Bruce-Gordon	London Borough of Bexley	Consultant
Kris Bryce	Pitlochry Festival Theatre	Executive Director
Suman Buchur	Freelance - Asian Culture Culture and Theatre Voice	Journalist
Richard Bunn	Arup	Theatre Consultant
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David Byrne	New Diorama Theatre	Artistic and Executive Director
Paul Callaghan	Live Theatre, Newcastle Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture Trust	Chair
Kate Carmichael	Theatres Trust	Communications Coordinator
Alan Carradus	J&C Joel	Estimating Manager
Roland Chadwick	Audio Light Systems	Associate
Balvinder Chowdhary	Nordicity	Creative Industries Consultant
Al Collier	GDS	Business Development Manager

Mike Cook	GVA Acuity Ltd	Associate
Simon Cooper	Northern Light	Projects Director
Matt Corbett	J&C Joel	Operations Director
David Coundon	Space Architects	Director
Dr Cara Courage	Futurecity	Independent Researcher and Strategist
Cllr Stephen Cowan	Hammersmith and Fulham Council	Leader
Simon Cox	Chauvet Professional	UK Key Account Manager
Damian Cruden	York Theatre Royal	Artistic Director
Julia Daly	Plann	Project Coordinator
Darren Daly	University of Portsmouth	PhD Student
Fraser Davidson	J&C Joel	Head of Projects - UK & EU
Paul De Ville	GoboPlus	Director
Miranda Debenham	Hope in Hell Theatre	Venue Manager
Bert Determann	Theater Rotterdam	Director
Anna Devlet	British Land	Head of Community
Jill Dickinson	Central Bedfordshire Council	Assistant Director Leisure & Libraries
Paddy Dillon	Theatres Trust Allies and Morrison	Trustee Director
David Draude	Really Useful Theatres Group	Head of Technical
Sian Dudley	Cast	Head of Marketing and Communications
Chris Dumas	GVA Acuity Ltd	Director
Nicola Dutton	Stagetext	Verbatim Speech to Text Reporter
Saul Eagles	Northern Light	Business Development Manager - Technical
Ruth Eastwood	Theatres Trust The Grand Theatre, Blackpool	Trustee Chief Executive
Grit Eckert	University of Bristol	Postgraduate Student
Brenda Edelstein	Triple E	Director
David Edelstein	Triple E	Managing Director
Barbara Eifler	Making Music	Executive Director
Michael Elliott	Sound Space Vision	Theatre Consultant
Fiona English	King's Head Theatre	Executive Director
Simon Erridge	Bennetts Associates	Director
Tim Eyles	Theatres Trust Taylor Wessing	Chair Managing Partner UK
Daniel Fell	Doncaster Chamber of Commerce	CEO
Rob Firman	Austin-Smith:Lord LLP	Director
Jason Flanagan	Flanagan Lawrence	Director
Mark Foley	Burrell Foley Fischer LLP	Principal
Tim Foster	Foster Wilson Architects	Partner
Mark Fox	Really Useful Theatres Group	Advertising Manager
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Simon Fraser	Allies and Morrison	Partner
Angie Fullman	Charcoalblue	Training & Development Coordinator
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Hannah Garrow	Leith Theatre Trust	Fundraising and Community Engagement Director
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Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West and Chester Council	Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member
Mike Goodwin	Unusual	Capital Projects Manager

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Steve Green	Charcoalblue	Studio Principal
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Ben Hanson	Charcoalblue	Senior Consultant
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Jenni Harris	Charcoalblue	Senior Consultant
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Richard Heath	Momentum Consulting Engineers Ltd	Director
Clr Richard Henry	Stevenage Borough Council	Councillor
Catherine Henton	The Sessions House CIC	Director
Philip Heselton	Philips Entertainment Lighting	Projects & Specifications Manager EMEA
Ollie Heywood	Allies and Morrison	Director
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Michael Howcroft	Hull University	PhD Student
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Alan Jacobi	Unusual	Managing Director
Jeremy James	Greenwich & Lewisham Young People's Theatre	CEO
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Martin Lydon	Haworth Tompkins	Associate

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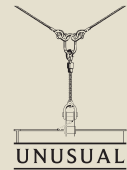
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